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Miami Call to Bob Kennedy Helps

\$2.9 Million Raised at 11th Hour

By James E. Clayton
Staff Reporter

A series of telephone calls, some of them made by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, raised \$2.9 million on the day before Christmas to meet Fidel Castro's last demand for the release of all the 1113 Cuban prisoners.

The sum had been promised by the Cuban Families Committee as the ransom for 60 sick and wounded prisoners released last spring. The Committee had been unable to raise the money, which was in addition to the \$53 million in food, medicine and medical supplies for the prisoners released this week.

Throughout the negotiations that led to the \$53 million swap, Castro had been telling James B. Donovan that the \$2.9 million in cash was a prerequisite. But it was not until Sunday night that this item became the sole remaining sticking point.

Phoned at 5 a.m.

At that time, Donovan, who negotiated on behalf of the Families Committee, and Washington attorney John E. Nolan, who was in Havana to help him, decided that the money had to be raised before Castro would release the last few hundred prisoners.

Nolan flew into Miami that night and began the telephone calls. He talked first to Deputy Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach and, at 5 a.m. Monday, to the

Attorney General. He told Treasury Robert Knight, Kennedy the money was needed by 3 p.m.

Between then and midafternoon, Kennedy, along with Gen. Lucius Clay, former Secretary of the Treasury Robert B. Anderson and former General Counsel of the

Treasury Robert Knight, raised the money.

The donors were not identified, but a Kennedy aide said yesterday that one of the Attorney General's personal friends pledged \$1 million after the situation was explained to him. The aide also said the

Families Committee hopes to raise more money so that the pledges made on Monday can be reduced.

While the drive for the funds was going on in Washington, Castro allowed a few more planes to load prisoners, Nolan said. But at 1 p.m. on Monday, he added, the exchange was halted with more than 400 prisoners still on Cuban soil.

Funds Deposited

Late in the afternoon, Nolan said, word came through from the Royal Bank of Canada that the funds had been deposited in Montreal. He and Donovan then met with Castro and his aides at the Canadian Consul's office in Havana where the final agreement was signed.

Even at that point, Nolan related, Castro wanted a guarantee from the negotiators that the \$2.9 million would be paid. "I'll guarantee it, and what's more I've got it," Nolan quoted Donovan as saying. Donovan, knowing quite well that American banks would be closed, told Castro to call his bank in New York and find out.

Castro did not pursue the question, Nolan said, and the planes began to take off for Miami again. Castro escorted him and Donovan to the airport, where they joined the last plane load of prisoners who arrived in Miami at 9:35 p. m. on Christmas eve.